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ENGLISH 391: COMPOSITION FOR ENGLISH TEACHERS

My Educational Philosophy

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Before even entering college courses geared toward education, whether such classes deal with methods, psychology, or administration, a prospective teacher should absolutely have an initial stand on issues concerning education. This, of course, comes with the assumption that a person studying education has chosen it in light of his or her aspirations in the field and not from lack of interest in any other major. Once the education courses have begun, this person will most likely see an evolution in certain views while also maintaining other beliefs that compose his or her entire teaching philosophy. In fact, one could say that the overall purpose of these courses is to help mold prospective teachers' views through discussion of important and controversial topics and careful observation of the opinions of other teachers and, perhaps more heavily, the views of other students within their group. I have observed within myself what is essentially the honing of my opinions and stands on education and, more recently, my philosophies toward the instruction of English and writing since my opening discussion in my first education class at Purdue. I have seen my previous beliefs, which can be classified as more traditional and conservative, change slightly to accommodate conventional and more liberal ideas. I began with a good deal of flexibility in my beliefs and have thus been able to both accept and rebut other statements of belief. In turn, other people in my classes have seemed flexible enough to ponder my opinions as well. I think that these classes are an important test of a prospective teacher's character and that they are a great asset for helping shape concrete beliefs that should persist throughout a career in teaching. My beliefs, though presently and perhaps inevitably incomplete, have grown into what increasingly serves as my general educational philosophy. In the following paragraphs, I will state my beliefs in writing while also taking the opportunity to evaluate them critically on a personal level.

I should begin by offering my views on a topic that might be the least favorite issue among teachers yet is absolutely necessary in creating an environment that allows and even hopefully condones the process of learning. Discipline is one of the most important

*Improper usage — this word is an adverb meaning "done with hope." What you mean here is "I hope" or "It is hoped that."*

*Impressive introduction*

*Use word here. This implies that experience will modify these views, as it often does.*

assets to a teacher's success. This word carries negative connotations to many individuals, yes. so I should elaborate on exactly what the word means in my own interpretation. The discipline that I speak of is not a strict totalitarian form of leadership centered around negative reinforcement. Rather, I center my idea of discipline around conscience and respect. First of all, every human being is born with a conscience, an inner voice that contemplates the morality of his or her deeds. The late and renowned psychoanalyst Erich Fromm called this voice the "humanitarian conscience," an innate ability to know construction from destruction, humanity from inhumanity. He also describes a second conscience which he calls the "authoritarian conscience." This inner voice helps a person make judgment calls as well, but these decisions are based on their fear of violation of authority and its consequences rather than personal reasoning (~~Behrens and Rosen~~ 364). In my experiences as a student, many teachers have played too much on my regard for authority rather than my own sense of personal reasoning (or on my authoritarian rather than my humanitarian conscience). This makes discipline more administrative. If I ever wanted to play a prank then I could choose to accept the consequences that I already anticipated. I find that other teachers, though fewer in number, have taken for granted that I should be able to reason all of my decisions thoroughly and reach the right conclusion on my own, a difficult task which also depends upon age. This can lead to an even worse scenario in which a student might make a bad judgment and be punished without knowing exactly what the issue really is. I think that, as I teacher, I have an obligation to reach out to both consciences. Some students might show greater regard for authority than others and some might show better personal judgment than others. Even still, some may display both qualities.

Along with an appeal to either type of conscience, I see the need to emphasize respect within the classroom. Respect as a single word can be specified to many circumstances and entities. Respect for others in general is the key. I would rather see my students hold a higher respect for my classmates than for me. Their consciences can be

trained to ask rhetorical questions of themselves as to whether their actions are respectful to their classmates ~~or not~~. This is not an example of an authoritarian conscience since they are dealing with how they should treat their peers and not how they should obey a superior. In fact, this type of reasoning helps to develop the humanitarian consciences of students. These personal judgments within each student are not elaborated on by simple authority and consequence discipline styles. <sup>usage unclear here</sup>

Once acceptable standards of the discipline which I have described have been discussed, the learning process should be able to take shape in my classroom. Without a doubt, I will be required to cover various mandatory topics in my class. Hopefully the mandated curriculum will have enough space to fill with both what I think are ideal topics and, more importantly, what the students would like to include in their studies. In fact, I intend to choose the supplemental curriculum of my classroom in conjunction with my students so that we might reach an agreement and compromise consisting of both interesting and useful topics. William Ayers used this approach in selecting his curriculum, and he details it in *To Teach: The Journey of a Teacher*. Ayers writes that "critically examining the curriculum, in a sense, *was* our curriculum" (~~Ayers~~ 90). This statement holds a great deal of value. By simply examining and discussing what should be included in classroom studies, the minds of the students are broadened whether they accept a particular issue or not. The topics that they do select for study become a realm of involvement that maintains their interest throughout the course. There can be no equal in education to that of the students' interest in the actual learning process. Peter McLaren calls this experience that leads to "identity formation" (~~McLaren~~ 223). I take this statement at face value.

The additional issues that my class chooses to focus upon, as well as the materials required by the administration, can help fuel the interest of the students toward their work and assignments. I remember English when I was in junior high and high school as the subject that everyone hated the worst. This may have been the result of certain teachers

Improper usage — see comment at the bottom of page 1.

Since you've already identified your source within the body of your sentence, you don't need to include his name in the parenthetical citation.

Unclear usage here —  
Can you hate something "the best"?  
Wouldn't it be clearer to say "the most"?

Excellent use of sources.

who discussed formal grammar or those that assigned each student a specific topic for noun-pronoun age their research paper. I believe that the research paper is an excellent starting place, but only if students are allowed to choose their own topics. While a great deal of new information is made accessible to the student, the focus of a research paper in an English course is to improve skills in English. Thus, even a paper which proposes the most intriguing forms of calligraphy can achieve the highest standard. In fact, while the research is important and required, the greater object of importance is the structure and form and the success of each student's argument. These are the fundamentals which secondary English teachers must instill in students in order to prepare them for more advanced writing techniques that will follow in their college careers.

An insightful point.

Teaching English cannot exclude grammar. Grammar in itself is a fundamental that precedes the basic topic sentence outline as a start. Even with a beautiful organization and an extraordinary argument, an ungrammatical paper loses a great deal of value due to the writer's neglect of simple (not necessarily *easy*) English. I can remember an editorial that I read in the local paper of my hometown a few years ago which condemned the newspaper staff for mistakes in naming the figures in a particular family photograph. The letter was full of slang and misused and misspelled words. The editors took it upon themselves to leave the letter unaltered when they published it. This is an example of the degradation of a point of view due to a lack of understanding of written English.

Good example

I see a solution in the merging of grammar with composition. I believe that the most effective way to teach these two aspects of written English is to teach them hand in hand, correct them together, and watch them improve simultaneously. Naturally, different students will advance at individual rates in both fields, but I believe that the system will prove effective both generally and specifically in the end. Constance Weaver has observed the success of teaching grammar in conjunction with writing in various classrooms and numerous situations. He echoes my belief in nearly the exact words: "Teaching 'grammar'

in the context of writing works better than teaching writing as a formal system<sup>1</sup> (Weaver 23). In this scope of things, it seems essential to me that the student should be primed with comments on structure first. Grammar is a finality and should be tended to during proofreading. Proofreading, to me, is careful reading with intent to find grammatical and spelling errors in the very final stage of alteration. Revision and re-revision are the processes that precede proofreading which focus on structure, form, style, voice, and argument. Once these five areas have been revised to a satisfactory level, a paper can be proofread.

reference  
w/ citation

The key element in making proofreading and revision work is communication with each student on an individual level. I firmly believe that conferences with individual students are absolutely essentially to obtaining rapport with each student on an individual level and even the group on a collective level. One on one meetings with each student allow a teacher to give them the specialized attention that their work needs and to focus on each individual problem with each student. At the same time, these conferences must be contained within the classroom in order to maintain the coherence of the class.

reference  
w/ citation

Reserving a desk in the corner and calling each student during class time to discuss their writing while the other students are present is the most effective way. Weaver wrote about a teacher who held such conferences [in his article] He observed how effective these conferences were on a personal level with each student and how the students began to help each other as well (Weaver 23). I believe that peer revision works very well, too.

Once cohesion within the class is established, the group should be able to comment on each others' papers without causing a great deal of distress. This procedure must be overseen very carefully by the teacher so that certain students do not become offended by the comments of others, (however).

If the teacher acts on both an individual and specific level with each student and on a general basis with the entire class then grading should not prove to be so questionable and indecisive. A teacher will know what has been discussed with each student and what

has been observed by the class together. The criteria will be set for grading and each student should prove what they have learned in their writing as long as they have put forth the effort. In fact, the criteria should be so concrete that the amount of effort involved in the work of each student should be apparent. Grading the writing of students, whether the paper happens to be argumentative, persuasive, or simply a recollection and summarization of research from each student, should be fairly clear and concise.

I believe that the foundations that I have mentioned are the basis for beginning as a first year English teacher. I realize that they will most likely change and adapt to certain situations and scenarios as I continue through my career. My ideas have been fortified by the beliefs and methods of more experienced people within the field of education, most of whom I have been introduced to through my college studies. I must admit, also, that many of my initial beliefs toward the goals and struggles of education have remained unchanged. Many of these unaltered philosophies have been inspired by what I have seen as a student. To me this is the most important development of ideas and educational concerns. As a student, I have been able to observe the things that I deem successful and those that I see as ineffective. As a teacher, I hope to capitalize on my observations and create an efficient and interesting classroom environment.

*Effective  
Conclusion.*

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